APRIL 2020

STAY AND PLAY EVALUATION

CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY

engage R+D

CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY

Background

Family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers are a vital part of our family and community networks. This group of caregivers includes extended family members, friends, neighbors and other adults who may receive pay or barter for providing care. Although defined as unlicensed childcare and often described as "informal" care, approximately 6.4 million children ages 0-5 in the US are in the care of an FFN caregiver[1]. Descriptive studies and evaluations have found that FFN care meets the needs of low-income working families because it is accessible, affordable, flexible and may also provide the desired cultural and/or language needs of families. Additionally, in many regions, families are not able to get a slot at an affordable childcare or development center so FFN care may be the only other option that they have.

In 2015, the Packard Foundation launched their Informal Care Strategy that was ultimately aimed at supporting parents, extended family and other informal caregivers to know how to provide the kind of nurturing and enrichment children need early in life to reach their full potential. This included funding testing and learning experiments of projects that are designed to engage informal/FFN caregivers; and to scale the most promising practices learned through the research and experiment phases. In 2016, one of the testing and learning experiments was the Oakland Public Library's *Play Café* program, an expanded and deconstructed story time offered weekly with the goal of engaging and supporting FFN caregivers of children ages 0-5. This library story time pilot demonstrated success through rapid increase in attendance, and 71% of caregivers reporting that they read more to the children in their care as a result of *Play Café*. The popularity of this program also led to its expansion from two sites in Oakland to nine sites within a year, multiple weekly sessions, and mutually beneficial community partnerships. As a result, the Packard Foundation funded a scaling grant to the California State Library (CSL) to test the expansion of this model across the state. Five diverse local branches in California (described below), were selected by CSL to test ways to enhance children's programming in libraries to meet the unique needs of informal/FFN caregivers and the young children in their care. These five libraries chose to name their collective efforts *Stay and Play*. The **five key elements** of *Stay and Play* included the following:

- Targeted and focused outreach to FFN caregivers,
- Specially designed story times that model read-aloud techniques,
- Play opportunities that model high quality environments and interactions with children,
- Programming and community resources to equip FFN caregivers with early learning information, and
- Provision of food or accommodations to meet food needs of caregivers and children.

This brief summarizes what was learned from how the five library branches implemented *Stay and Play* in their communities.

[1] National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. "Characteristics of Home-Based Early Care and Education Providers: Initial Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education." OPRE Report 2016-13, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016

Cover Page Photo Credit - Terry Lorant Photography, CA State Library LSTA grant

Evaluation Approach

The California State Library partnered with Engage R+D to provide learning and evaluation services for *Stay and Play*. The evaluation sought to address the following questions:

- How did the branches approach implementing the five key elements of *Stay and Play*?
- How does *Stay and Play* look in different community and library settings?
- What are promising practices/mechanisms/tools/resources to improve the quality of interactions between adult caregivers and the children they care for?
- What *Stay and Play* practices and/or approaches have the potential to scale to more libraries?

The focus of this evaluation was in the following areas:

- **Supporting learning between the local branches and CSL.** Learning activities included a logic modeling session where branches were guided through a process to develop their own logic models for their *Stay and Play* projects (see Appendix C Branch Logic Models). Also, the evaluation team and CSL worked together to facilitate two convenings for branches to share their implementation experiences.
- **Building evaluation capacity.** In addition to developing logic models, the evaluation team helped branches to identify evaluation questions based on what they wanted to learn from their *Stay and Play* projects and what data they would need to collect to answer those questions. We worked with the branches to identify how and what data is already being collected by them, and mapping that to what they wanted to know. We also provided examples of easy methods to collect data if they needed or were interested in implementing new data collection methods. This process led to the development of a short Caregiver Survey (see Appendix B Evaluation Survey Tool) translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, and Mandarin for all branches to use in their second phase of *Stay and Play* implementation. Ongoing technical assistance was also provided.
- **Collecting data across library branches.** Building on the above, the evaluation team followed the principles of a lean data approach[2] to collect data across the branches to document and learn how branches were implementing *Stay and Play,* what they learned from implementation, and what caregivers learned from *Stay and Play*. We examined the logic models developed by each branch, sent questionnaires with open-ended questions to the library staff, collected Caregiver Surveys (described above) from all branches, and asked branches to send any additional data that they collected. We summarized findings through infographics (see Appendix A Phase 1 and Phase 2 Evaluation Highlights) and decks at learning meetings to help CSL tell the story of *Stay and Play*.
- **Identify promising practices and strategies with the potential to scale.** We shared evaluation and learning tools and best practices that could be easily adapted by library staff (e.g. Caregiver Survey), and identified promising best practices and strategies based on what the evaluation team documented across the pilot library sites, to be included in the *Stay and Play* tool kit CSL is developing.

[2] "The Lean Data approach is a new approach to social impact evaluation that is designed for testing and learning. It emphasizes using data to create value for an organization and its beneficiaries (vs. reporting and compliance) and uses methods and technologies for data collection that favor efficiency and speed while maintaining rigor. This approach was designed for and tested in environments that are uncertain, dynamic, complex and resource-constrained." SSIR, Winter 2016.

Stay and Play Library Branches

The five branches that were selected to pilot *Stay and Play* represent a diverse set of communities across California and serve a range of individuals. At the beginning of the grant, each of the five branches conducted a needs assessment to further understand the FFN caregivers in their community and to inform the design of their program. A brief description of each participating branch is detailed below:

- **The Grass Valley branch of the Nevada County Community Libraries** is a downtown branch that serves a rural, mountain community in northern California. This region is an area impacted by wildfires, and in 2019 many victims of the Paradise Fire relocated to Grass Valley. Grass Valley is also home to a high population of retired individuals, as well as low income families, with 60% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch.
- **San Jose Public Library:** The San Jose Public library serves a culturally diverse community in a large city and is the largest library system between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The library serves informal caregivers that speak at least 13 different languages.
- **The Mendota branch of the Fresno County Public Libraries** serves a community with a population of 11,404. Of Mendota residents, over 98% are Hispanic or of Latin descent and the poverty rate among those that worked full-time for the past 12 months was 12.31%. Among those working part-time, it was 52.24%, and for those that did not work, the poverty rate was 48.13%

- **The Pixley branch of the Tulare County Libraries** is a rural community made up of close-knit families and individuals, many whose primary occupation is farm worker. There are many multi-generational homes within the community and, in addition to the library, schools and churches are the main community resource in this region.
- **The Eastside branch of the Santa Barbara Libraries** serves families across the Santa Barbara community, some of whom live within walking distance, some who live several miles away, and some who come from as far as 45 minutes away. Many participants in their *Stay and Play* program are Spanish speaking (60%); the English-speaking parents have varying levels of fluency in Spanish and are interested in their children hearing and learning Spanish as well.

Key Findings

Both phases of the evaluation yielded rich information and data about the successes and challenges each library branch faced while implementing *Stay and Play* within their communities. The infographics in Appendix A highlight key learnings from each distinct phase of this work, with cross-cutting themes detailed below:

- **Library staff reported that it was important to dedicate time to planning and creating a space that is welcoming and appropriate for *Stay and Play*.** Most library staff reported that it took longer than expected to plan projects, activities, and to build out their space, but once it was completed it was worth the time. They also reported that they learned and made adjustments as they went along, such as dedicating more time to interacting directly with caregivers and children versus having guest speakers; providing coffee for caregivers and snack or snack time for the children; and incorporating transition songs between activities. They also mentioned the value of debriefing and reflecting with staff which "gave staff the chance to discuss how these activities promoted early literacy and school readiness." Finally, staff reported that it was good to test new formats for their children's programming: "Staff had never thought of this program format before and it has really grown into a much-loved program among patrons and staff."

  "The Stay and Play Program is a favorite among staff that are part of it They appreciate creating a sense of community and strong relationships with caregivers and their children."

  - Library Staff

- **Through *Stay and Play*, pilot sites gained new library card holders and developed positive and trusting relationships with caregivers, resulting in caregivers feeling more connected to the library.** Library pilot sites reported that *Stay and Play* participants have become regular library patrons since the program started. Staff observed that, over time, caregivers became more comfortable in the library space and started to utilize other resources offered at the library. This shift didn't happen right away but was the result of library staff building trusting and positive relationships with caregivers, through creating a welcoming and intentional environment that fosters quality interactions with caregivers. As a result, library staff reported that some caregivers have made visits to the library a regular part of their routine; staff also observed that caregivers are more comfortable interacting and communicating with library staff, whether it be a question about resources or to share exciting news about the development of a child in their care. As one library staff member put it, "Spending time and interacting one-on-one with children and their caregivers in a relaxed atmosphere makes amazing connections. The connections we have built with the families is what keeps them coming back week after week."

  One-quarter of Phase 2 participants had never been to the library before attending Stay and Play.

- **Caregivers learned new ways to interact with children in their care and implemented new practices and activities in their home care settings.** A key element of *Stay and Play* is play opportunities at the library that model high quality environments and interactions with children that can be easily implemented in home settings. Many caregivers noted that they have continued to utilize school readiness activities that they learned at *Stay and Play*. For example, one caregiver said that the child in their care has been eager to sing the songs and play the games learned at *Stay and Play* when they are home. Further, 65% of caregivers surveyed said they notice times throughout the day when they can do activities with the child in their care "a lot more" than they did before participating in *Stay and Play*.

  Another key element of *Stay and Play* is story time designed for both caregivers and children that models read-aloud techniques. Survey data revealed that, since participating in *Stay and Play*, caregivers and children are spending more time engaging in literacy activities. For example, since participating in *Stay and Play*, 66% of caregivers reported spending "a lot more time" reading, looking at books, or telling stories to the child in their care.

- **Caregivers understand more about the role they play in helping the children in their care be ready for school.** Through *Stay and Play*, FFN caregivers received affirmations about the meaningful and essential role they play in children's lives; for some caregivers, it was the first time their role had been acknowledged that way. More than three-quarters (83%) of caregivers that participated in *Stay and Play* said they now have a better understanding of the role they have in helping children in their care be ready for school; 81% said they have a better understanding of the importance of having a nurturing relationship with the children in their care. With an instilled sense of confidence and a deeper understanding of their role, many participants felt empowered to support school readiness, learning, and development for the children in their care.

> *"All parents/caregivers – if given the opportunity –will apply lessons that will benefit the children in their care."*
>
> *-Library Staff*

- **Caregivers built strong social connections with other participants and reported feeling more aware of local resources.** Isolation can be a problem that FFN caregivers face. Through *Stay and Play,* staff noted caregivers and children alike were able to make friends with others in the program and engage in social opportunities that helped reduce isolation. One library staff member noted, "We had two grandmothers come as strangers, and leave as friends, trading info and taking selfies to show their kids (parents of children attending) that they had made friends at the library." Further, over 80% of caregivers said they now spend more time talking or sharing ideas about caring for children with other adults.

  In addition to building social connection with other caregivers, *Stay and Play* participants reported being more connected to local resources and services. One of *Stay and Play's* key elements is programming and community resources that equip FFN caregivers with early learning information. These activities included making connections to community partners, bringing in guest speakers, providing resource binders and bulletins, and in some cases library staff serving as a community navigator. As a result of these efforts, more than 70% of caregivers surveyed reported feeling "a lot more" supported in their community after participating in *Stay and Play.*

Reflections and Implications

The evaluation of this work strives to continue learning and building the evidence base for programming for FFN caregivers. Our reflections and implications of this pilot project include the following:

Libraries are an effective avenue for scaling FFN programming. Learnings from the *Stay and Play* pilot demonstrate that libraries hold significant potential as a space to engage and connect with FFN caregivers. Libraries are trusted community hubs that build collections and programming that reflect the community they serve. Their ability to offer supports and resources in addition to *Stay and Play* programming is important for FFN caregivers that are often isolated and are not aware of or lack access to resources. Survey data from phase two revealed that, across the five branches, 43% of *Stay and Play* participants were FFN caregivers. Given that FFN caregivers are a hard-to-reach population that often experience isolation, it is notable that branches were able to engage such a high number of FFNs through their programming through targeted and focused outreach.

Libraries must adapt aspects of their *Stay and Play* approach to support the unique needs of their communities. The five key elements of effective library FFN programs[3] guided each branch during implementation, helping to get their programming off the ground. However, each site quickly learned that they needed to tailor each component to the community they were serving. Successful FFN

[3] (1)Targeted and focused outreach to FFN providers; (2) Library story time specifically designed for informal caregivers and children; (3) Play opportunities that model high quality care settings and encourage caregiver/child interactions; (4) Programming, resource materials, and community experts to better equip caregivers with child development and early learning information; and (5) Provision of food or opportunities to accommodate the food needs of caregivers and children

programming requires core resources and supports, but also the flexibility to adapt to meet the unique needs of each community. As one library staff member said, "*in implementing the Stay and Play project, staff found that maintaining a constant sense of flexibility was very effective. After each Stay and Play program, staff would meet to discuss what changes needed to be made in order to improve as well as what was successful.*"

Pilot libraries have plans to expand Stay and Play to other branches in their jurisdiction. When asked about their next steps for *Stay and Play*, nearly all pilots said they were interested in exploring opportunities to bring the program to other branches in their jurisdiction. In fact, two pilot sites have already expanded *Stay and Play* to new locations. One piloted the program at three additional branches in their jurisdiction, another piloted *Stay and Play* at a local elementary school in their community; both sites have plans to sustain these additional locations moving forward. This highlights the value and benefit of the *Stay and Play* program in communities and is evidence of its potential to expand to other libraries across the state.

Data can help library staff learn about their communities and strengthen their programming. Evaluation and data helped library staff engage in continuous learning and enabled CSL, pilot libraries and the evaluation team lift up promising strategies and practices from a new program (i.e., *Stay and Play*). This evaluation used a lean data approach, which allowed the evaluation team to capitalize on data that libraries were already collecting, supported pilots in developing logic models, and added to existing data systems by collaboratively developing a survey that libraries could easily implement across multiple languages. Library staff participated in training and evaluation activities which helped them gain comfort with data collection and consequently, demonstrated how it helped strengthened their programs. Moving forward, the pilot libraries will be able to build on their logic models and (see appendix C) as they adjust their programming, and can use the survey tool developed (see appendix B) to continue to track participant progress over time. New libraries can also try these tested evaluation and data collection methods as they implement *Stay and Play*.

Appendix A: Phase 1 and Phase 2 Evaluation Highlights

STAY AND PLAY PHASE 1 HIGHLIGHTS (Jan. – May 2019)

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Effective Outreach Methods

- Word-of-mouth from participants
- Local partners who helped to promote *Stay and Play*
- Visit schools during drop-off and pick-up times

Primary Program Components

- Read aloud/Storytime
- Singing
- Free play centers
- Snack/Mealtime
- Others: guest, group activities, caregiver workshops

Contacts with Caregivers and Children

416 Adults

435 Children aged 0-5

"We had two grandmothers come as strangers, and leave as friends, trading info and taking selfies to show their kids (parents of children attending) that they had made friends at the library today." -library staff

"Love everything. Everything of the program - the singing, dancing, reading and snack time. Hope to see more programs like this one." -caregiver

Evaluation Methods Used

- Surveys in multiple languages
- Observations
- Journaling
- Open-ended questions on charts, post-its
- Process tracking

Key Outcomes – Phase 1

- Caregivers noted that they felt **more aware of local resources suggesting library staff were able to connect caregivers to local resources and services**.
- Staff were able to **build relationships with caregivers** through *Stay and Play* as well as **connect caregivers to each other.**
- Caregivers reported that they **felt more connected to the library**.
- Grass Valley Library staff created an **easily reproducible program that focused on school readiness, early literacy, and reaching informal caregivers**.
- Through *Stay and Play*, branches **gained new adult and child library card holders**.
- Caregivers and families were **actively using other resources in the library and/or returning to the library on non-program days**.
- Relationships with caregivers were established and they **often sought help from Mendota library staff**.
- Caregivers reported that they **learned ways to teach the children in their care**.

STAY AND PLAY: PHASE 2 HIGHLIGHTS

This infographic displays descriptive information about the parents, caregivers, and children that participated in Phase 2 of Stay and Play.

How did participants learn about Stay and Play?

Library staff/website	56%
Friend	27%
Flyer	10%

One-quarter of participants had never been to the library before attending Stay and Play.

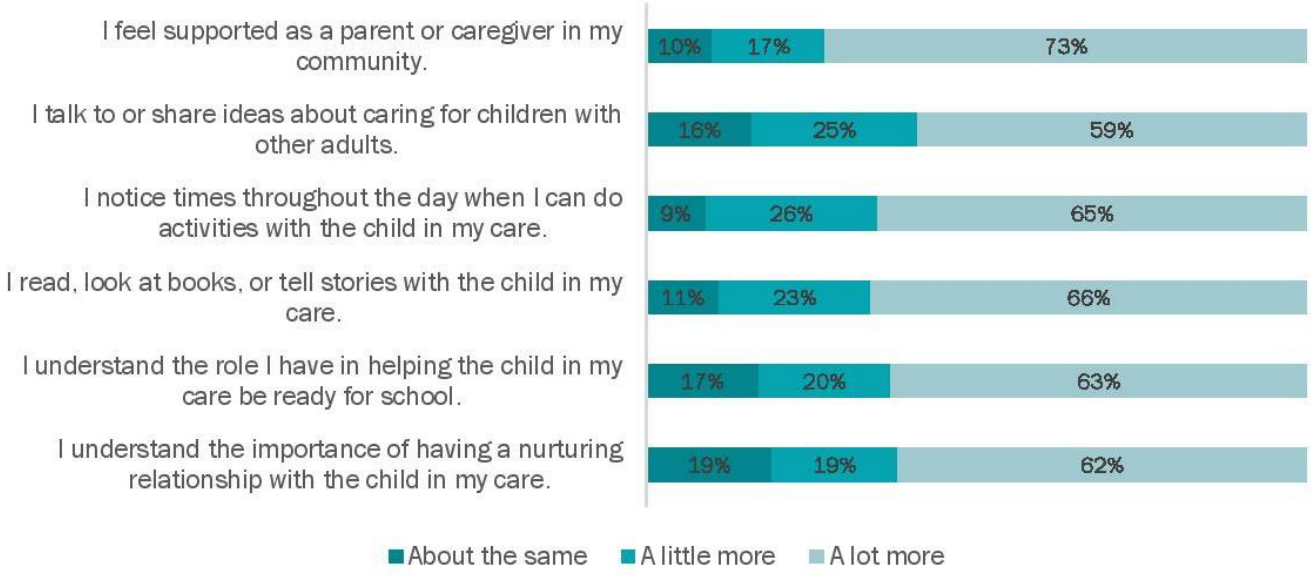
43% of participants were informal caregivers. Of that group, 44% were grandparents, 30% were babysitters/nannies, 15% were friends/neighbors, and 11% were other relatives,

58% of participants attended Stay and Play more than 4 times, **with 26%** attending more than 6 times

Primary reasons for attending Stay and Play

- Opportunity for child to socialize
- Story time
- Entertainment for child
- Opportunity to socialize with other parents/caregivers

How much parent/caregiver knowledge and behavior has changed as a result of participating in Stay and Play:



Appendix B: Evaluation Survey Tool

Library Branch: _____

Stay and Play

Caregiver Survey

Welcome! You were invited to take this survey because of your participation in your library's Stay and Play program. The experiences you share will ensure Stay and Play improves and grows in the future.

It is important to know:

- → There are no right or wrong answers
- → Your participation is voluntary and you can end the survey at any time.
- → You can skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering
- → Any information you share will be confidential

1. **Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about Stay and Play:**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Stay and Play/library staff understand my needs as a parent/caregiver.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Because of my participation in Stay and Play I know more about the resources and supports available at this library.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would recommend Stay and Play to other parents/caregivers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. **Please check the box that describes how your knowledge or behavior has changed as a result of participating in Stay and Play.**

	About the same	A little more	A lot
a. I understand the importance of having a nurturing relationship with the child in my care.	☐	☐	☐
b. I understand the role I have in helping the child in my care be ready for school.	☐	☐	☐
c. I read, look at books, or tell stories with the child in my care.	☐	☐	☐
d. I notice times throughout the day when I can do activities with the child in my care.	☐	☐	☐
e. I talk to or share ideas about caring for children with other adults.	☐	☐	☐
f. I feel supported as a parent or caregiver in my community.	☐	☐	☐

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3. If you want to, please tell us about what skills you and/or the child in your care has gained because of participating in Stay and Play?

4. What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving Stay and Play?

About You

5. How did you find out about Stay and Play?

- ☐ Flyer
- ☐ Heard about it from a friend
- ☐ Heard about it from Library staff
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Library website
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

6. What made you decide to come for the first time? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Story time
- ☐ Food, refreshments
- ☐ Entertainment for child
- ☐ Opportunity for child to socialize
- ☐ Opportunity to socialize with other parents/caregivers
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

7. How many times have you attended Stay and Play?

- ☐ 1-3 times
- ☐ 4-6 times
- ☐ 6-10 times

8. What is your relationship to the child in your care?

- ☐ Grandparent
- ☐ Sibling
- ☐ Other relative (e.g., aunt, uncle, cousin)
- ☐ Nanny/babysitter
- ☐ Friend/neighbor
- ☐ Parent/guardian
- ☐ Other: _____

9. Before coming to Stay and Play, had you been to the library before?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Thank you for completing the survey!

Appendix C: Branch Logic Models

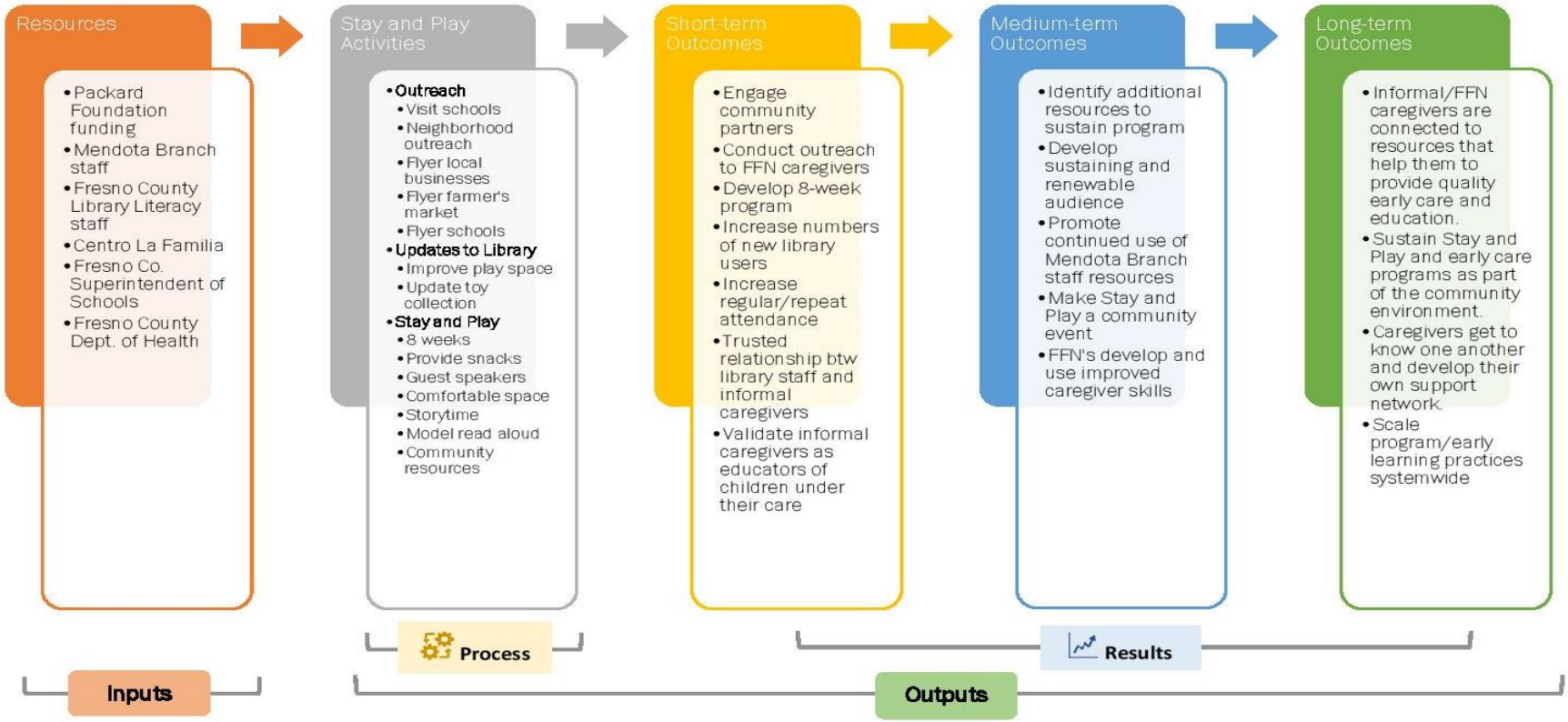
Stay and Play Logic Model, Phase 2: Fresno-Mendota Public Library

Goals/Needs:

Stay and Play is intended to bridge a partnership between family, friend and neighbor caregivers and libraries in a comfortable environment to improve responsiveness and provide support for the needs of informal caregivers.

Learning Questions:

- What are the characteristics and needs of the FFN caregiver?
- What activities are to be delivered and how should it be implemented?
- What are the potential barriers to the program's success?
- What motivates FFN caregivers to come to Stay and Play?
- What are caregivers learning from Stay and Play?



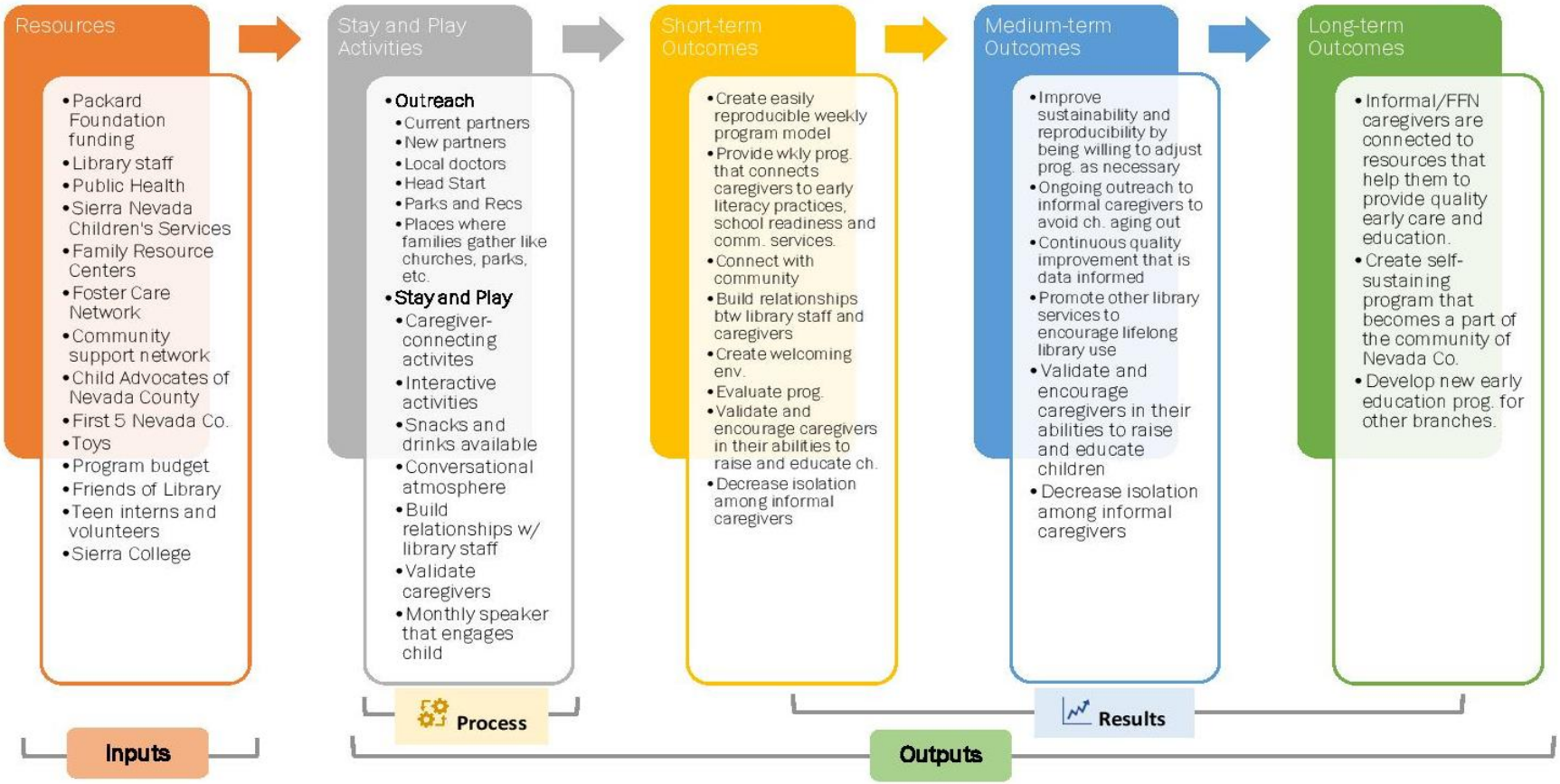
Stay and Play Logic Model, Phase 2: Grass Valley Public Library

Goals/Needs:

We intend to connect informal/FFN caregivers to community services, early literacy, and school readiness in a welcoming environment that encourages socialization and education.

Learning Questions:

- Do caregivers feel supported?
- Do caregivers know how to find services or connections in the area?
- What brought caregiver to the library? What is effective outreach?
- Has the program increased caregivers' confidence to care for a child?
- How can we build trust/relationships with this caregiver community?
- Are caregivers satisfied with the program?
- What have we learned and how can we improve?



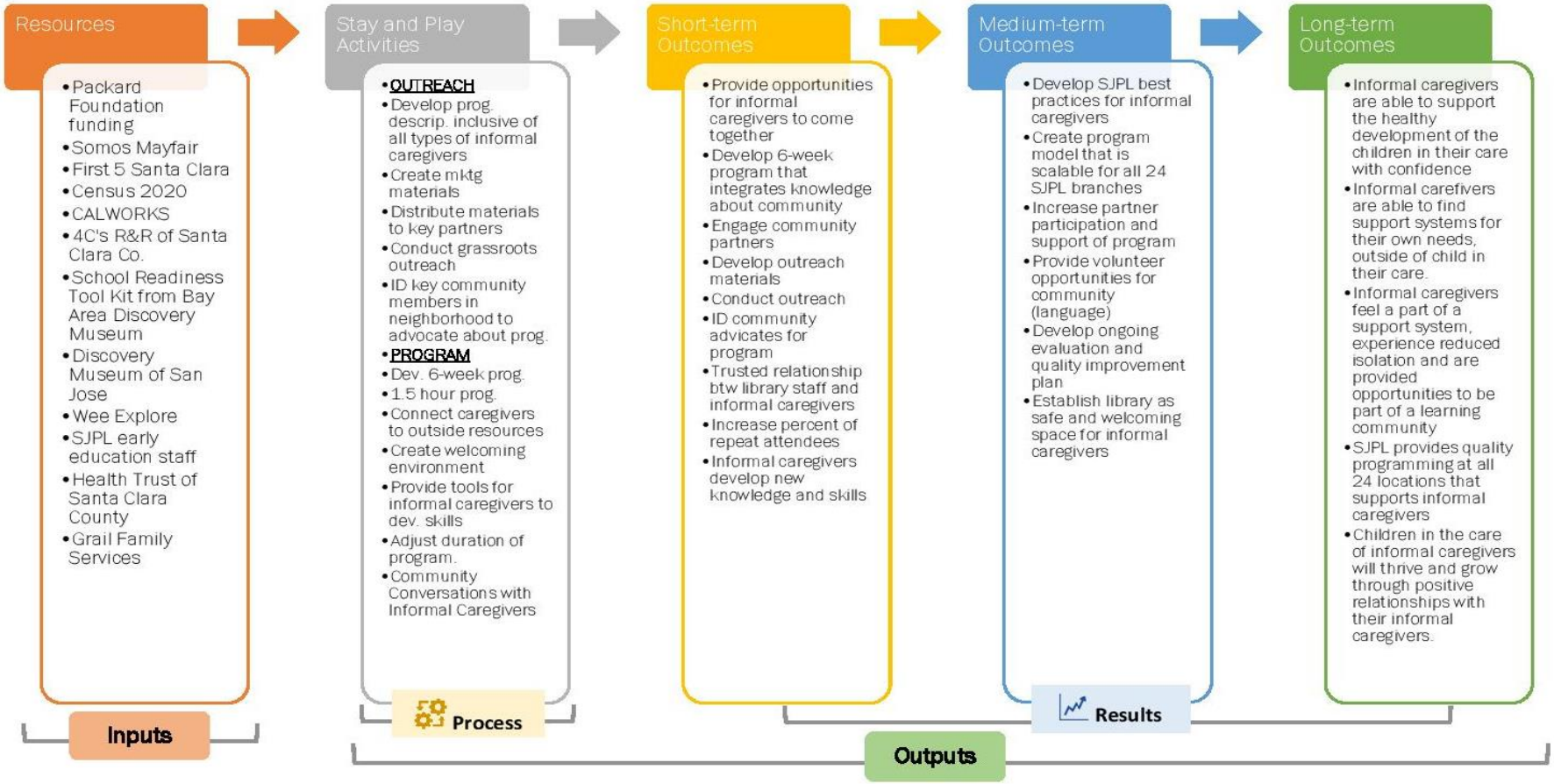
Stay and Play Logic Model, Phase 2: San Jose Public Library

Goals/Needs:

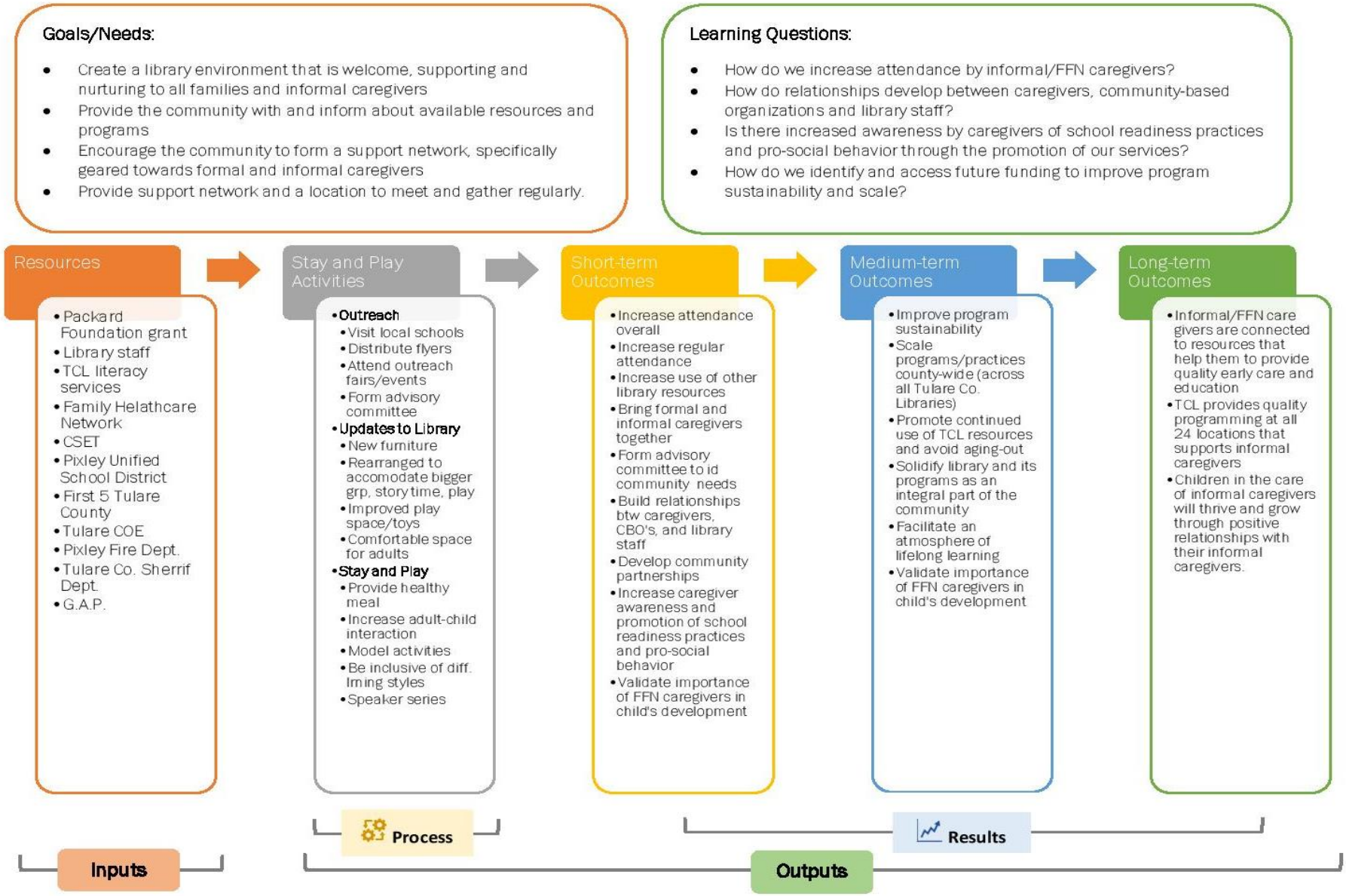
- Support informal caregivers so that they may be able to support the healthy development of the children in their care.
- Develop support systems to reduce isolation and increase exposure to opportunities to be part of a supportive community.
- Identify best practices through the pilot that can be replicated at the other 24 SJPL locations with a focus on intentionality and support specifically for the informal caregiver.

Learning Questions:

- What types of resources or supports do informal caregivers need in our community?
- What are effective outreach strategies for reaching informal caregivers?
- What are the most promising learning strategies to engage informal caregivers?
- How do we reduce isolation/increase socialization for informal caregivers in our community? How do we know this was accomplished?
- How do we keep informal caregivers engaged and continuing to participate in our learning community?



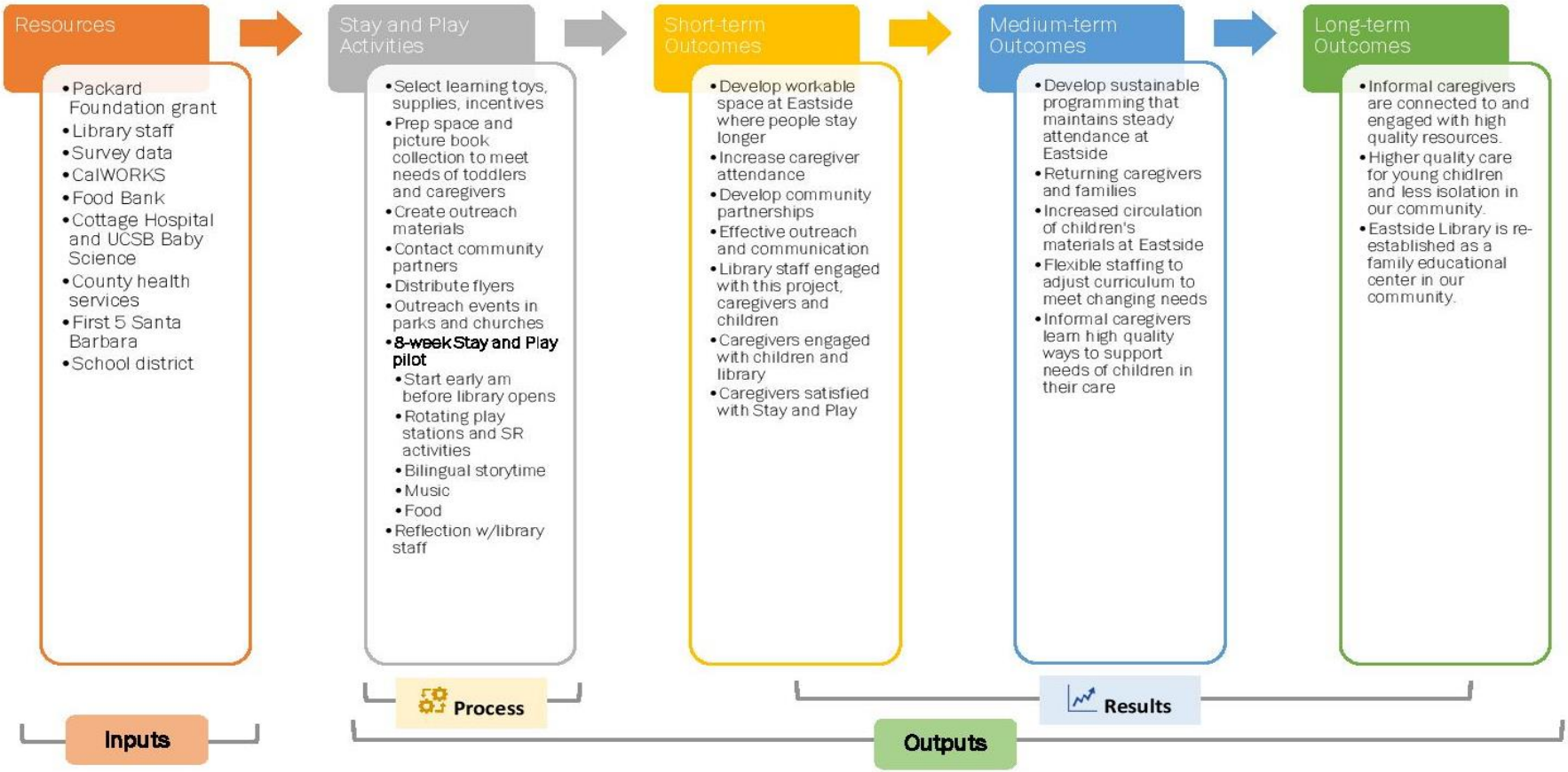
Stay and Play Logic Model: Tulare County Public Library, Pixley



Stay and Play Logic Model: Santa Barbara Public Library

Goals/Needs:

- To increase access to library services by underserved communities and in particular, build trust with the Eastside Community
- Increase school readiness for students in our community by increasing the informal caregiver competency and quality of their early care and education.

Learning Questions:

- What will bring FFN caregivers to the library (effective outreach)?
- How is what we do at the library unique and how can we build upon current efforts and partner (rather than duplicating)?
- What will encourage a habit of visiting regularly?
- How are needs of FFN caregivers and parents the same and different? What needs can the library meet?
- How was the experience for library staff?
- What did FFN caregivers learn?